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The present invention relates to apparatus and methods used in oil well drilling and oil well operations for transmitting measurement data to a surface station from locations in a borehole.

## Background of the Invention

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Electromagnetic telemetry via earth path has been tried with limited success. Even at very low data rates, it works only to a limited depth, depending on the resistivity of the earth.

Acoustic telemetry through the drill pipe itself has been studied extensively but not used commercially, so far. In theory, data rates in the 10's of bits/second should be possible using acoustic waves in the steel.

The idea of putting a wire in the drill pipe has been proposed numerous times over the past 25 years. Shell and Exxon each reportedly built an experimental wired drill string in the late 1970's. Prior art relating to these efforts is disclosed in US patent 4,126,848 to Denison, "Drill String Telemeter System"; US patent 3,957,118 to Barry et al., "Cable System for use in a Pipe String and Method for Installing and Using the same"; and US patent 3,807,502 to Heilhecker et al., "Method for Installing an Electric Conductor in a Drill String"; and the publication "Four Different Systems Used for MWD", W. J. McDonald, The Oil and Gas Journal, pp 115-124, 3 April 1978. Such systems are believed to have suffered from poor reliability and high cost because of the large number of electrical connectors.

IFP developed a system known as "Simphor" which used wireline cables and large, robust wet connectors. It has never been commercialized for measurement while drilling applications. This system is believed to have suffered from interference with the drilling process.

The use of inductive couplers in drill pipe is known. US patent 4,605,268, to Meador, "Transformer cable connector" describes the use and basic operation of inductive couplers mounted at the sealing faces of drill pipes. Russian patent 2,140,537, "A system for transmitting electrical energy and data within a column of adjoining tubes", November 1999, describes a drill pipe telemetry system that uses inductive couplers. WO Publication 90/14497A2, by Eastman Christensen GMBH, "Process and device for transmitting data signals and/or control signals in a pipe train" describes an inductive coupler mounted at the ID of the drill pipe joint for data transfer.

Other US patents are as follows: US patent 5,052,941 to Hernandez-Marti et al., "Inductive coupling connector for a well head equipment"; US Patent 4,806,928 to

Veneruso, "Apparatus for electro-magnetically coupling power and data signals between well bore apparatus and the surface"; US Patent 4,901,069 to Veneruso, "Apparatus for electro-magnetically coupling power and data signals between a first unit and a second unit and in particular between well bore apparatus and the surface";

- 5 US Patent 5,521,592 to Veneruso; "Method and apparatus for transmitting information relating to the operation of a downhole electrical device"; US Patent 5,278,550 to Rhein-Knudsen, et al., "Apparatus and method for retrieving and/or communicating with downhole equipment"; and US Patent 5,971,072 to Huber et al., "Inductive coupler activated completion system".

- 10 None of these references has provided a telemetry system for reliably transmitting measurement data at high data rates from locations near the drill bit to a surface station. Therefore, there exists a need for a telemetry system for reliably transmitting measurement data at high data rates to a surface station from locations in a borehole.

15 **Summary of the Invention**

The invention provides a family of low-loss inductive couplers for use in wired pipe strings. The invention provides two groups of embodiments, flux-loop embodiments and current-loop embodiments.

- 20 A first embodiment includes a first flux-loop inductive coupler element with a ring-like first core having high magnetic permeability, the first core defining a first exterior substantially cylindrical face and a first interior conical-section annular face.

- The first interior face defines a first interior conical-section annular larger-diameter face (herein below referred to as "first larger-diameter face"), a first interior conical-section annular smaller-diameter face (herein below referred to as "first smaller-diameter face"), and an annular first groove. The first groove is located
- 25 between the first larger-diameter face and the first smaller-diameter face. The first element further includes a first electrically conductive coil wound within the first groove. The first embodiment further includes a second flux-loop inductive coupler element with a ring-like second core having high magnetic permeability, the second
- 30 core defining a second interior substantially cylindrical face and a second exterior conical-section annular face.





## Detailed Description

### General

The invention provides a low-loss inductive coupler for use in wired pipe joint components of a wired drill string. Two main versions are disclosed: flux-loop versions and current-loop versions.

### First Embodiment

FIG. 1 is a partially cut away perspective view of a first (flux-loop) embodiment of an inductive coupler according to the present invention. FIG. 1 shows low-loss flux-loop inductive coupler **10** having a first flux-loop inductive coupler element **21** and a second flux-loop inductive coupler element **22**. Element **21** includes a ring-like first core **31** having high magnetic permeability. First core **31** is shown enclosed within first protective coating **41** that also defines thick cylindrical first end **42**. (In some embodiments the protective coating is omitted.) First core **31** defines a first exterior substantially cylindrical face **33** and a first interior conical-section annular face **34**. First interior face **34** defines a first interior conical-section annular larger-diameter face **35** (herein below referred to as “first larger-diameter face”), a first interior conical-section annular smaller-diameter face **36** (herein below referred to as “first smaller-diameter face”), and an annular first groove **37**. First groove **37** is located between first larger-diameter face **35** and first smaller-diameter face **36**. First element **21** further includes first electrically conductive coil **38** wound within first groove **37**, and substantially concentric with first core **31**. Element **22** includes a ring-like second core **51** having high magnetic permeability. Second core **51** is shown enclosed within second protective coating **61** that defines thick cylindrical second end **62**. Second core **51** defines a second interior substantially cylindrical face **53** and a second exterior conical-section annular face **54**. Second exterior face **54** defines a second exterior conical-section annular smaller-diameter face **55** (herein below referred to as “second smaller-diameter face”), a second exterior conical-section annular larger-diameter face **56** (herein below referred to as “second larger-diameter face”), and an annular second groove **57**. Second groove **57** is located between second smaller-diameter face **55** and second larger-diameter face **56**. Second element **22** further includes second electrically conductive coil **58** wound within second

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groove 57, and substantially concentric with second core 51.

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of mated first and second flux-loop inductive coupler elements of the embodiment of FIG. 1. First and second elements 21 and 22 are adapted to mate with first larger-diameter face 35 facing second larger-diameter face 56, and with first smaller-diameter face 36 facing second smaller-diameter face 55.

FIG. 2 shows faces 35 and 36 defining a cone with an apex, on axis X-X of the first core, defining angle A between faces 35 and 36 and axis X-X. The associated exterior faces, 55 and 56, define a cone with a corresponding apex on the axis of the second core.

FIG. 2 further shows first conduit 47 in first core 31 providing a passage for one or more electrical cables 48 into the interior of the wired pipe joint. Likewise, second conduit 67 in second core 51 provides a passage for one or more electrical cables 68 into the interior of the adjacent wired pipe joint. (The wired pipe joints are not shown in FIG. 2.)

FIG. 3 is an expanded cross section view of mated elements of the embodiment of FIG. 1. FIG. 3 shows magnetic flux loop crossing gap 28 between cores 31 and 51. When first and second elements 21 and 22 are mated, first and second cores 31 and 51 form a low-reluctance closed ring-like magnetic path around the first and second coils. Arrows A1 and A2 indicate the closed magnetic path crossing gap 28 between cores 31 and 51, and encircling first and second coils 38 and 58. FIG. 3 shows coils 38 and 58 occupying, by design, a relatively small portion of gap 28 between the facing cores. In one embodiment angle A is, by design, an acute angle of approximately 25°. These design features maximize the area of facing cores, within constraints imposed by the need for mechanical robustness, to minimize electromagnetic energy losses in each element.

Thus, each core has an annular face transverse to its plane defining a conical surface. Each annular face has a central annular groove dividing the annular face into a larger-diameter annular face and a smaller-diameter annular face. Each core has a coil wound within its annular groove. The coil does not substantially protrude forward of the conical face. The core defines a conduit for passage of at least one or more electrical cables from the coil to at least an opposite edge of the core. In some



embodiments, there would be one conductor using the joint pipe wall as a return, two conductors or two or more pairs of conductors.

Inductive coupler elements are functionally symmetrical about the rotational axis of the drill string, in that they can transmit signals regardless of their relative orientation.

FIG. 4 is a cross section view of flux-loop wired pipe joint **20** according to the present invention. Wired pipe joint **20** includes first element **21** and second element **22** of the inductive coupler shown in FIG. 1. FIG. 4 shows wired pipe joint **20** between two adjacent wired pipe joints **71** and **72**. Wired pipe joint **20** includes elongate tubular shank **25**, electrical cable **27**, first flux-loop inductive coupler element **21**, and second flux-loop inductive coupler element **22**. Shank **25** defines an axial bore, a first sealing face **45**, and second sealing face **65**. Electrical cable **27** extends along at least a portion of the interior of the bore. First element **21** is located within a first end of the shank and is connected to a first end of electrical cable **27**. Second element **22** is located within a second end of the shank and is connected to a second end of electrical cable **27**. First and second inductive coupler elements **21** and **22** are mounted to first and second tubular support members **23** and **24**, respectively, within the bore of the pipe joint. Electrical cable **27** can be any electrically conductive means including a pair of wires, a twisted pair, a coaxial cable, a flex circuit, or a single wire (using the wall of the pipe joint as one of the conductors). Cable **27** could be located in a groove cut into the outer surface of the pipe joint. Alternatively, the cable could be in a gun drill hole within the length of the pipe joint wall, or could be within the pipe bore of the pipe joint as a secured cable, or could be installed as loose wires.

FIG. 5 shows a version of the embodiment of FIG. 4 having electrical cable **27** supported by mandrel **26**. The mandrel and the cable are shown in cross sectional view located within the bore of shank **25**. In another version, a mandrel in helical form is provided to allow easy insertion or removal. Twisting the mandrel to tighten the helix would reduce its diameter for easier insertion or removal. The mandrel's spring-like quality would hold it tightly within the pipe joint when twisting is released.

FIG. 6 is an electromagnetic model of first element **21** of the embodiment of FIG. 1. FIG. 6 shows first coil **38** and second coil **58** electro-magnetically coupled to first core **31** and second core **51**, respectively. The first and second cores facing each other across gap **28** form a closed loop for magnetic flux.

5 FIG. 7 is an electromagnetic model of the wired pipe joint of FIG. 3.

Protective coating **41**, shown in FIGS. 1 and 2, covers the wires and coils with an appropriate insulating material to withstand downhole conditions. However, the mating surfaces are only thinly coated or may be uncoated to ensure maximum coupling.

Mounting flux-loop inductive couplers at the drill string connections invariably results in some gap between the two core faces that affects efficiency. The gap between the cores is caused by tolerances in the connection features, change in dimensions from wear, the presence of a protective/hermetic coating on the cores, and the presence of any debris caught between the coupler halves. The magnetic flux that links the two halves of the coupler flows across this gap. Any magnetic flux that leaks while bridging this gap degrades the efficiency. The leakage of magnetic flux into the steel that surrounds the ferrite cores is another source for losses. Any conductive fluid, such as a water-based mud, that may occupy this gap will allow the circulation of eddy currents and give rise to additional losses.

20 The cores, by design, have an angular shape to reduce any flux loss at the gap and increase efficiency. A drill string coupling configuration that minimizes the gap between the coupler halves provides optimal performance. Pipe joints with close tolerances at the connection points and hard mounted couplers can provide reduced gaps. Another possibility is to spring load and float one or both of the coupler halves  
25 to help remove any debris and so reduce the gap, while using standard pipe joints. Having a large gap between cores and the surrounding pipe joint walls can reduce flux leakage into the steel.

In one embodiment, the core is fabricated from a zinc-manganese ferrite material, by grinding or casting suitable pieces. The core may be produced as a continuous ring 30 or in segments that are assembled into a continuous ring. Because the flux lines travel around the edges of the coupler (not along its circumference), the core need not be a

continuous ring because the flux is transverse to the circumference of the ring. It may be made up of individual ferrite segments that are assembled into a segmented ring, though the winding of course would be continuous along its circumference.

Alternatively, it may be made up of individual thin steel segments, effectively a laminated structure.

A variant on the embodiment shown in FIGS. 4 and 5 is illustrated in FIG. 8. In this embodiment the mandrel supports both the electrical cable and the inductive couplers. As illustrated in FIG. 8, inductive coupler elements **81** and **82** are supported on a mandrel **86** that carries electrical cable **87** and is inserted in each pipe joint, preferably while it is still on the pipe rack. The mandrel is designed to support and protect the cable that connects the two inductive coupler elements of the wired pipe joint. The pipe joint provides structural support for mandrel **86**. The mandrel is formed as an elongated section from a lightweight cylinder of fiber-reinforced composite or sheet metal sliced lengthwise. When not enclosed by the pipe joint, the mandrel has a diameter that is larger than the internal diameter of the pipe joint. As illustrated in FIG. 8, mandrel **83** with its cable **84** is inserted in pipe joint **85**. (See also FIG. 5, showing lightweight mandrel **26** inserted in elongate tubular shank **25**.) After the mandrel is inserted, the elasticity of its semicircular cross section pushes against the wall of the pipe joint bore and holds it in place. Other methods, such as clips or springs, could be also used. FIG. 8 is a cross section view of a wired pipe joint having first and second flux-loop low-loss inductive couplers similar to those shown in FIG. 1. FIG. 8 also locates first and second sealing faces **88** and **89** with respect to inductive coupler elements **81** and **82**.

#### Second Embodiment

FIG. 9 is a partially cut away perspective view of a second (current-loop) embodiment of an inductive coupler according to the present invention. FIG. 9 shows low-loss current-loop inductive coupler **110** having a first current-loop inductive coupler element **131** including a first high-conductivity, low-permeability layer defining first high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped belt **133**, and a second current-loop inductive coupler element **151** including a second high-conductivity, low-permeability layer defining second high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped

belt **153**. FIG. 10 is an enlarged cross section view of the electromagnetic components of mated elements **131** and **151**.

A low-loss current-loop inductive coupler according to the second embodiment may be viewed as a pair of transformers connected back to back through the metal of the pipe joint connection.

Referring again to FIG. 9, first current-loop inductive coupler element **131** includes a first coil **142** wound about a first ring-like core **141** that is oriented in a plane transverse to axis Y-Y, surrounding first bore **136**. Second current-loop inductive coupler element **151** includes a second coil **162** wound about a second ring-like core **161** that is oriented in a plane transverse to the axis of second current loop element **151**, surrounding its axial bore. First element **131** includes a portion of first pipe joint connection, proximate to first connection threads, that has a first high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped belt **133** partially surrounding the first coil. Second element **151** includes a portion of second pipe joint connection, proximate to second connection threads, that has a second high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped belt **158** partially surrounding the second coil. First high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped belt is shaped to cooperate with a second high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped belt of an adjacent wired pipe joint. When a first wired pipe joint and an adjacent second wired pipe joint are mated, the first and second high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped belts create a closed electrical conducting toroidal path enclosing both the first coil of the wired pipe joint and the second coil of the adjacent wired pipe joint. The closed electrical conducting toroidal path may include a short portion of the wall of the pipe joint. The highly conductive path does not need to be continuous for the design to be effective. A short portion of steel shank surface bridging a gap in what is otherwise a high-conductivity, low-permeability path, would not have a significant effect. Also, while in its simplest form "toroidal path" suggests a solid surface, the closed electrical conducting path could be segmented along the major circumference of the toroid because current does not need to flow around the major circumference of the toroid.

Each coil induces an electrical current in the pipe joint itself, in particular, as invented by the inventors, along high-conductivity, low-permeability layers of the

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pipe joints. A layer of conductive material is attached to or coated on the pipe joint surfaces surrounding the two cores to reduce losses due to electrical resistance. The conductive material could be copper, copper alloy, aluminum, silver, or gold, i.e., any material that has a conductivity that is substantially higher than the conductivity of steel. The magnetic core material is selected to help minimize power losses and withstand the downhole environment. In most configurations, the current-loop inductive coupler includes a magnetic core carrying a winding on the order of a hundred turns of wire, and the coils are over-molded with rubber to help protect them from the environment.

As shown in FIG. 10, first coil 142 is located in toroidal cavity 144. Toroidal cavity 144 is defined by the open surface of first shaped belt 133 that is layered over first shaped surface 139 and by the open surface of second shaped belt 153 that is layered over second shaped surface 159. Cavity 144 is formed close to the threads and the sealing faces. First shaped belt 133 encircles the bore. Second shaped belt 153 encircles both the bore and first shaped belt 133. In this configuration, the coils are well protected from the drilling environment. Each coil is preferably hermetically molded with a protective coating of rubber, but other type of polymeric over-molding may be used.

A layer of high-conductivity, low permeability material (such as copper) is attached or plated to the surfaces of the grooves surrounding the two coils. This reduces the resistance to the electrical current that links the two cores. It also prevents the magnetic field from penetrating into the pipe material, thereby increasing the efficiency of the coupler. In some embodiments tested by the inventors, attenuation has been reduced to less than 0.2 dB per coupler. The high-conductivity, low-permeability layer need only be a few skin depths thick at the lowest frequency of operation (about 1 mm for the embodiment of FIGS. 9 and 10). In one embodiment, the conductive layer is formed by electroplating. Alternatively, it may be formed by electro-forming, explosive-forming, or other method known in the art. Preferably, the cavity in which the coil is placed is designed to minimize the path length along the surfaces in a radial plane. Suitable high-conductivity, low permeability materials

include copper, copper alloys (such as brass, bronze or beryllium copper), silver, aluminum, gold, tungsten, and zinc (and alloys of these materials).

The magnetic core material is chosen to minimize the hysteresis and eddy current losses. Magnetic tape materials available under the names Supermalloy and Metglas® have been found to be suitable, though other materials might be used. Supermalloy is available from Magnetics®, a Division of Spang and Company, East Butler, Pennsylvania, USA. Metglas® is available from Honeywell Amorphous Metals, Morristown, New Jersey, USA.

The ring-like cores are preferably formed by winding the magnetic tape material on a mandrel, annealing, and impregnating with epoxy. The mandrel is then removed to maximize the core cross section. In order to minimize flux leakage losses in the toroids, the wires are preferably wound densely, with minimal gaps between turns. This is achieved through the use of closely wound round wire or flat wire. However, other techniques may be used, including depositing the winding by plating or sputtering (the insulating spiral being obtained by masking or etching), or by a flexible printed circuit board construction. Thin insulators are used to keep this winding in close proximity to the conductive layer. Additional capacitors can be installed and connected in parallel with the primary windings to reduce the resonant frequency.

Referring again to FIG. 9, low-loss current-loop inductive coupler **110** includes first element **131** that defines a first axis Y-Y, a first axial bore **136**, and a first sealing face **135**. It further includes first electrically conductive coil **142** wound about first ring-like core **141**. Core **141** is oriented in a plane transverse to axis Y-Y, surrounding first bore **136**, and located within first element **131**. First element **131** has a male tapered pipe-thread **132**, and a first high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped belt **133** partially enclosing first core **141**. First high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped belt **133** is shaped to mate with a complementary second high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped belt **153** of an adjacent pipe joint second end element having a corresponding second electrically conductive coil wound around a second ring-like core. The two cooperate to create the closed electrical conducting toroidal path **124** of FIG. 12. Path **124** encloses both cores when inductive coupler

elements **131** and **151** are mated. Protective coatings **138** and **158** surround first and second cores, respectively. Path **124**, seal-region high-conductivity, low-permeability layer contact rim **123**, and thread-region high-conductivity, low-permeability layer contact rim **128** are shown in FIG. 10.

5        FIG. 10 shows first element **131** defining first conduit **134** enclosing first electrical cable **143**. Likewise, second element **151** defines second conduit **154** enclosing second electrical cable **163**.

FIG. 11 is a cross section view of a wired pipe joint according to the present invention having first and second elements of the low-loss inductive coupler of FIGS. 10  
10        9 and 10. FIG. 11 shows current-loop wired pipe joint **120** having an elongate tubular shank **125**. Shank **125** defines an axis and an axial bore **129**, a first current-loop inductive coupler element **131**, a second current-loop inductive coupler element **151**, and an electrical cable **127**. Cable **127** extends axially within at least a portion of the bore. Cable **127** is shown in FIG. 11 supported by mandrel **126**. Alternatively, cable  
15        **127** could be located in a groove cut into the outer surface of the pipe joint. Or cable **127** could be in a gun drill hole within the length of the pipe joint wall. Or it could be within the pipe bore of the pipe joint as a secured cable or as loose wires.

The reliability of both the flux-loop inductive coupler system and the current-loop inductive coupler system could be improved by introducing redundant cables. Two  
20        pairs (or more) of wires could be run from end to end on each joint and two independent coils could be wound in each coupler, so that a single broken wire would not cause a system failure. If the wires are independently insulated, any one of them could be shorted to mass without bringing down the system.

FIG. 12 is an electromagnetic model of the first element of the embodiment of  
25        FIGS. 9 and 10. Item numbers correspond to items illustrated in FIG. 11.

FIG. 13 is an electromagnetic model of the wired pipe joint of FIG. 11, showing electrical cable **127**.

### Third Embodiment

FIG. 14 is a cross section view of a third embodiment of a low-loss inductive  
30        coupler according to the present invention having first and second current-loop inductive coupler elements. In this embodiment, first and second cores and first and

second high-conductivity, low-permeability layers are located proximate to the sealing faces of the wired pipe joint.

#### Fourth Embodiment

FIG. 15 is a cross section view of a fourth embodiment that is quite similar to the third embodiment in that the high-conductivity, low-permeability layers are located proximate to the sealing faces of the wired pipe joint.

#### Fifth Embodiment

In a fifth embodiment (not shown), the wired pipe joint comprises an elongate tubular shank made of a high-conductivity, low-permeability material. The shank defines a first high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped belt at a shank first end, and a second high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped belt at a shank second end.

#### Sixth embodiment

FIG. 16 is a cross section view of a sixth embodiment of a low-loss inductive coupler according to the present invention having first and second current-loop inductive coupler elements within the pipe joint bore.

In a first version, first ring-like core **171** and its associated coils of this embodiment are mounted to first high-conductivity, low-permeability tubular support member **175**. Support member **175** is locally attached to the first pipe joint inside the first pipe joint bore. Likewise, second ring-like core **172** and its associated coils are mounted to second high-conductivity, low-permeability tubular support member **176**. Support member **176** is locally attached to the second pipe joint inside the second pipe joint bore. When the coupler elements are mated, first high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped belt **173**, second high-conductivity, low-permeability shaped belt **174**, and the two high-conductivity tubular support members **175** and **176** form a high-conductivity closed electrical conducting toroidal path. This path surrounds both cores and their coils, and functionally corresponds to path **124** in FIG. 12. Support members **175** and **176** could be made of any suitable high-conductivity, low-permeability material such as beryllium copper, or of a magnetic material such as steel with a coating of high-conductivity, low-permeability material.

FIG. 17 is a perspective view of a threaded male end of a wired pipe joint containing a first element of the embodiment of FIG. 16. FIG. 18 is a perspective



view of a threaded female end of a wired pipe joint containing a second element of the embodiment of FIG. 16.

#### Seventh embodiment

A seventh embodiment (not shown) provides a wired pipe joint having a shank  
5 made of a high-conductivity, low-permeability material, such as beryllium copper.

#### Eighth Embodiment

A seventh embodiment provides a pair of short inductive coupler subs, one with a male thread, the other with a female thread. Each sub has a short shank made out of a high-conductivity, low-permeability material, such as beryllium copper, and a single  
10 inductive coupler element. The seventh embodiment is not shown but uses components disclosed herein above as part of the second embodiment. The single inductive coupler is similar to one of the two ends of the second embodiment. A first sub would be screwed onto the first end of conventional (non-wired) pipe joint and a second sub would be screwed onto the second end of the pipe joint to make a wired  
15 pipe joint assembly (not shown). The two inductive coupler elements of this wired pipe joint assembly would be electrically coupled to each other at the drill head by a cable threaded through the bore of the pipe joint. The use of inductive coupler subs triples the number of threaded joints, but does not increase the number of inductive coupler elements needed for a given drill string. The method of use requires that at  
20 least one cable connection be made after the inductive coupler subs are installed.

#### Ninth embodiment

A ninth embodiment provides a pair of short inductive coupler subs, one with a male thread, the other with a female thread. Each sub has a short shank, a single inductive coupler element, and a support member made out of a high-conductivity,  
25 low-permeability material. The ninth embodiment is not shown but uses components disclosed herein above as part of the sixth embodiment.